

bob cromie



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Fun and Books, Russian Style

● WASHINGTON, June 10—Nicholas Benton, publicity chief of Time-Life Books, was vastly amused last night during a reception at the Russian embassy [to celebrate publication of his People's Russian Cookbook] by the fact that the Time-Life Moscow correspondent had just been ordered out of the country.

Benton also told of bringing one of the first finished copies of the book as a gift to the wife of the ambassador last January and having one of the embassy officials, who had not even examined it, say that the volume was "very well done."

"How could you possibly know?" asked the astonished Benton.

"O, we have read it already," was the reply. "It was printed near Baltimore, was it not?"

Benton added that the books were indeed printed near Baltimore, at a plant which also does much work for the Russians.

● THE AFFAIR WAS an elegant one, with plenty of vodka, and table decorations consisting of fresh vegetables, such as beets and turnips—carved into startlingly realistic roses by the embassy chef. Guests, who included Norman Rockwell, the noted illustrator, were faced with a formidable array of hors d'oeuvres, among them belyashi, bliny, kulebiaka, piroshki, chebureki, vareniky, pelmeni, tabaka, dolmasy, kotleti, liulia-kebab, shashlyk, pilaf, and uatsivi. Dolmasy, in case the word is strange to you, is grape leaves stuffed with a rice mixture.

One of the undersecretaries, told by a guest that the room in which the main reception was held was a "lovely one," replied mournfully:

"The last time someone made that remark it delayed the building of a new embassy for 10 years. Your President, Mr. Eisenhower, was here with Mr. Khrushchev in 1959, the only American President ever to visit the embassy, and told Mr. Khrushchev that this was the finest reception room in town. Later, when the ambassador told Mr. Khrushchev that he needed a new embassy, Mr. Khrushchev replied: "Mr. Eisenhower said you already have the best reception room in town. What else do you need?"

● THIS SAME OFFICIAL, on being introduced to Stuart Harris, publicity director for Harper and Row, said:

"Ah, yes, you are the people that publish Alleluia Svetlana. What mischief is she up to now?"

Harris said that so far as he knew Stalin's daughter was not working on anything new, and the secretary asked what else the firm published. Stuart mentioned the first title that came to mind, the best-selling "Love Story," by Erich Segal, then realized that it was unlikely the Russian would be reading a romantic novel. But the other's face broke into a smile.

"My wife is very fond of that book," he said.

Harris invited the author to a party for Segal, and the invitation was accepted.

It should have been mentioned earlier that there now is a new Russian embassy building in the works. The location is a site obtained by trading a large lot in Moscow for one of comparable size here.

The 70th annual American booksellers convention will end here tonight with a dinner addressed by David Frost, television host.